



THE CITY OF AUGUSTA

WILLIAM R. BRIDGEO
CITY MANAGER

To: Mayor and Council
CC: City Staff
Fr: City Manager Bill Bridgeo
Da: December 30, 2011
Re: Year End Retrospective

In China, 2011 was the Year of the Rabbit. In Augusta, Maine, it might have been entitled "The Year of Four Mayors" or perhaps "The Year of the Asphalt Plant" or maybe even "The Year of the Big Snows". The Chinese will soon welcome in 2012 - the "Year of the Dragon" – presumably with the fireworks they are credited with inventing. We will, at least for the time being, hold off on that particular aspect of celebrating.

As I reflect back on life in our City over the year now coming to a close, I feel a sense of satisfaction that we, as City government, have successfully met many challenges, experienced a number of transitions and passages, coped with some inevitable frustrations, and enjoyed the company of so many good people – elected officials, staff, volunteers and residents - who share the desire to make life in Augusta fulfilling, prosperous and satisfying. Some are mentioned below but, of course, so many others made significant contributions – most not concerned for recognition but only for the betterment of their City.

With the departure of Mayor Katz to new digs and responsibilities across the river, Councilors Paradis and Rollins stepped into the breach to lead City government until a special election could be held in June. Though their abbreviated tenures only provided limited opportunity to exercise the duties of mayor of the Capital City, both did a great job and I very much enjoyed the chance to work closely with them. After a spirited mayoral campaign featuring two of Augusta's most respected public servants, Mayor Stokes took the helm in the midst of some tough, often emotional Council policy questions. I think it is understating the case to say that throughout 2011 the tone of civic discourse and the integrity of the local political process shone as an example for other cities and towns. In November, the voters chose two newcomers to City politics, Jeff Bilodeau and Dan Emery, to seats on the Council and returned veteran councilors Mike Byron and Mark O'Brien to fresh terms. They also elected seasoned School Board member Sue Campbell to a term as Chair of the Board and seated Debbie Towle and Larry Ringrose to the Board.

With the help of our able legislative delegation, we successfully lobbied against legislation that would have shifted \$180,000 a year in corporate fleet excise tax payments out of Augusta to other communities and proposed state budget cuts that would've changed the way that we receive state revenue sharing. Mayor Paradis' lengthy state legislative experience proved valuable as he testified on our behalf on these issues.

We continued to work successfully with our partners in the Brownfields programs at DEP and EPA, bringing even more grant money to Augusta for clean-up of the former Statler Tissue mill site. Mayor Rollins, Development Director Mike Duguay and I spent time in Philadelphia aggressively promoting that cause. Using some of the most recent \$400,000 remediation grant funds that we successfully pursued (bringing our total over the past three years to well over \$1 million), consultants led by former MDOT Commissioner John Melrose are working with City staff and the Council's East Side Planning Committee to craft a vision for the 20-acre parcel's adaptive reuse. Councilor Darek Grant and his committee met many times over the course of 2011 and produced a valuable blueprint for growth and development for the entire east side of the riverfront.

On the topic of community and economic development, hats are off to the Parkhurst family for their faith in the future of downtown Augusta and the residential and commercial redevelopment they've created this past year. (It's hard to imagine that one lone business establishment's relocation could create the excitement and energy that Downtown Diner has.) Boosted by the impressive work of the Augusta Downtown Alliance and its dedicated participants, the prognosis for downtown is better than it has been in many years. In the "works in progress" category, in 2011 we toiled away on redeveloping the Flatiron Building, on prodding the Kennebec Arsenal developer, and on facilitating a natural gas pipeline (including approving a TIF for it).

Partnering with many others, we had a role in advancing the establishment of the new MaineGeneral hospital and celebrated its ground-breaking. Senator Collins' great work in securing highway funding for the expanded I-95 interchange dramatically highlighted the project's momentum (while she was simultaneously securing relief for Maine from the federal truck weigh limits that have plagued us for years).

For quality of life milestones in 2011, we enjoyed great seasons at Bicentennial Park, the Farmers' Market, races on the Rail Trail, and the premier season at the Bond Brook Recreation Area (helped greatly by that 115 inches of snow we recorded). We built petanque courts and beach volleyball courts and rebuilt North and South Chestnut Streets (with our own in-house resources). The Friends of Lithgow Library kicked off a classy initiative to raise \$4 million toward renovating and expanding the library. The early response has been impressive and demonstrates the esteem which Lithgow as an institution enjoys within the community.

We worked cooperatively with the Greater Augusta Utilities District to undertake the massive Mt. Vernon Avenue storm water abatement project (and are all over our counterparts at MDOT about rebuilding the road once the utility work is done).

Early in 2011, Council received the in-depth management study of the Police Department prepared by the International Association of Chiefs of Police and charged our new chief, Bob Gregoire, with implementing its recommendations (which he's been making strong progress on). The most reassuring element of that report was contained in its first paragraph where it

stated that “Augusta is well served by the Augusta Police Department”.

In large measure due to the dogged advocacy of Senator Katz, the LePage administration overcame its misgivings about bonded indebtedness and gave the green light to the new Kennebec County Courthouse project. A new home was found for Crisis and Counseling Services, the financing for the courthouse (upwards of \$50 million) was finalized and architectural and engineering design commenced. (And let us not forget the championing role played by former Senator Elizabeth Mitchell, particularly in her time as Senate President, that got the project approved in the first place.)

As if she did not have enough challenges as our newly minted Director of Public Works (with the 115 inches of snow!), Lesley Jones oversaw the contractual \$3.2 million capping and closure of Phase II of the Hatch Hill Regional Landfill – which included the installation of a state-of-the-art methane gas flaring system (which will reduce by 29 times the amount of greenhouse gases that are emitted into the atmosphere).

As one who is frequently the subject of newspaper articles, I often have some frustration over the headlines (though I appreciate that it’s not the reporter who writes them). So, if I had the liberty of crafting headlines for significant stories about City government in 2011 they might read like:

- Council crafts balanced comprehensive 2011/2012 budget after weeks of in-depth deliberation.
- Council resolves longstanding mineral extraction/asphalt plant vs. neighborhood compatibility issue in favor of neighbors.
- Council committee addresses balanced policy for use of herbicides/pesticides in public ways throughout Augusta.
- City sponsors CDBG funding for expanded homeless shelter facilities (sub-headline: City also assists in establishment of warming shelter for winter).
- Voters approve Council-sponsored bond referendum for Gilbert School Improvements (sub-headline: \$1.2 million also approved for Cony area neighborhood street improvements).
- Council accepts staff analysis and recommendations for energy efficiency improvements and contract with Revolution Energy.
- Occupy Augusta doesn’t occupy City properties (sub-headline: City Manager cancels order for case of Maalox).
- Augusta airport sees millions in state and federally funded improvements
- Augusta firefighters rescue man from burning building.
- City enjoys upgraded and expanded local access television services through contract with Digital Spirit media.
- Augusta to the Rescue – City lends talented staff resources to Chelsea as it addresses daunting problems.
- Fieldstone Place housing project defies national trends and surges with new home construction.

- Bill Cosby wows Civic Center crowd (sub-headline: Not mistaken this time for School Board Chair).
- Augusta Volleyball ringers clobber UMA counterparts for second straight year.

And, sadly, as the year comes to a close: “Augusta says farewell to native son John Charest whose service to his City began at age sixteen and was only interrupted by his military service and, in the end, his illness – peace be upon him”.